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ABSTRACT

Equipped with the National Child Care Staffing and the new Profiles of Child Care studies, researchers are close to estimating the number of child care providers in the formal child care system. Estimates of the number of providers in the system, which includes in-home housekeepers and nannies, unregistered or licensed family child care providers and relative care, are incomplete and difficult to make. Knowledge of the level of preparation and ongoing training of providers is far from complete. Part of the problem is that the general public, and to some extent those involved in the field, confuse experience with training. The bulk of the research finds experience to be a poor predictor of effective teaching, but belief systems do not always accommodate this information. The process of getting reliable information on training is complicated by several other issues, among them inadequately differentiated and elaborated categories of training, the interaction of training and the work environment of the provider, and lack of clarity concerning the roles of formal education and training in producing effective providers. The French system of training providers is impressive; by expecting high levels of training they have ensured a base of quality in their child care programs. (RH)

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Preparation and Professional Development Programs for Early Childhood Educators: Emerging Needs for the Next Decade

Carnegie Corporation

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Response to Questions

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A. Knowledge Base

1) Level of coverage - current versus ideal

With the National Child Care Staffing Study (NCCSS) and the new Profiles of Child Care study we are close to estimating the number of child care providers in the formal child care system. Estimating the number of providers in the informal child care system - in-home housekeepers and nannies, unregistered or licensed family child care providers and relative care is extremely incomplete and difficult. In my experience we have only had success in locating these providers when we have begun with the parents and asked them for access to the providers. Even though it is a difficult task I believe that it is essential that we include these providers in our discussions of training. Informal or exempt providers as we call them in California comprise a large proportion of the child care supply. However we know next to nothing about either the development of children, the range of provider practices, the belief systems of providers regarding training, or provider characteristics in these care settings.

Our knowledge of the level of preparation and ongoing training of providers is far from complete. I think that we can only get this information from talking directly to the providers and by extremely carefully worded questions. It is not enough to ask providers if they have had training, even in a particular area. We learned from the (NCCSS) that we get the most precise information when we specifically ask the providers if they had had specific training content, e.g. early childhood education or similar material in particular locations, ie. vocational school, college, workshops at conferences, etc. When we asked the directors about the training of each staff member we got very global information. When we compared director and provider reports the directors had over-estimated the training of the staff. It is sobering to remember that the NCCSS was conducted in the most formal area of child care -- center based care. When I have studied family day care providers it has been

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even more difficult to get precise information about training. I suspect that it is even more difficult with relatives or in-home providers. Part of the problem is that the general public and to some extent the field confuses experience and training. The bulk of the research finds experience to be a poor predictor of effective teaching but our belief systems do not always accommodate this information.

Getting reliable information on training is complicated by several other issues. First it is probably insufficient to distinguish between pre-service and in-service training. Rather there appear to be at least four relevant categories of training - - 1) pre-service coherent training programs as have been traditionally found in two- and four-year colleges where the students are not working as providers 2) short term coherent training programs where the students intend to work as providers such as 2 to 4 week programs provided for family day care providers as they become licensed 3) training programs for providers who were hired as providers, who may have pre-service requirements for the job as in California, but are simultaneously beginning working and training and 4) in-service ongoing training for providers who have had some training in categories 1 through 3. I suspect that effective teaching is linked to the type of training program as well as whether or not the provider has training and the parameters of effectiveness of the training programs differs for each category.

Second the work environment of the provider interacts with the training. In the NCCSS we found that most center providers work alone, this is also true for most family day care providers and in-home providers. Therefore a provider with no training or only minimum training has little opportunity to have on-going supervision from a trained and experienced provider. As well the low levels of compensation of providers and the absence of a career ladder means that there is little incentive for providers to receive training. We have assumed that teachers in some work environments, e.g. public schools, need more training than teachers in other work environments, e.g., family day care. This is an assumption that could be challenged by careful research that looked not only at the amount but also at the kind of training needed for particular environments. As many providers move across work environments it would be useful to research what types of child related training are most easily transferred.

Finally we have only begun to untangle the roles of formal education and training in producing effective providers. The NCCSS found formal training to be a better predictor of effective teaching than training. This may be because the levels of training are low. However if the NCCSS represents one of our best attempts to understand

provider preparation it is troubling that we found so few providers who had participated in coherent formal or informal, ie CDA, training programs.

There is currently little agreement on the minimum levels of hours and credits. In my opinion we need studies that start by measuring provider's training in a precise manner, their work environments, and their effectiveness as teachers in order to map the relations among these three variables. We do not need more studies that evaluated a single model training program. Most model training programs are reasonably effective but reach only a small proportion of providers. I suspect we now know how to train. What we need to know is how many providers are actually getting some amount of training and what level of training in what type of work environment is sufficient to produce an effective teacher. Then we need to figure out how to compensate these effective teachers so that they remain in the field.

2) Content of Preparation and Training Programs

As a member of the French-American Study tour I was very impressed with the French system of training providers. By expecting high levels of training they have ensured a base of quality in their child care programs.